

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A seat belt warning apparatus for a vehicle occupant, comprising:
a seat belt;
an audible indicator for generating an alert sound;
a controller for providing via the audible indicator, either one of a first audible alert corresponding to a first warning level and a second audible alert corresponding to a second warning level that is higher than the first warning level when the seat belt is unbuckled, the controller being adapted to sound a first alert chime by repeating an alert sound having prescribed frequency and volume at a first cycle during the first audible alert, and a second alert chime by repeating the same alert sound at a second cycle that is different from the first cycle, during the second audible alert.
2. A seat belt warning apparatus as set forth in claim 1, wherein the controller is further adapted to sound the first alert chime via the audible indicator in an initial stage of the second audible alert, prior to sounding the second alert chime.
3. A seat belt warning apparatus as set forth in claim 1, wherein
the controller is further adapted to activate the first audible alert in response to detecting the seat belt being unbuckled upon turning on the ignition of the vehicle, and activate the second audible alert in response to detecting the seat belt being unbuckled when the vehicle is running at a prescribed speed or more.
4. A seat belt warning apparatus for a vehicle occupant, comprising:
a seat belt;
an audible indicator for generating an alert sound;
a controller for providing via the audible indicator, either one of a first audible alert corresponding to a first warning level and a second audible alert corresponding to a second warning level that is higher than the first warning level when the seat belt is unbuckled, the controller being adapted to sound via the audible indicator an alert chime corresponding to the first warning level before an alert chime corresponding to the second warning level during the second audible alert.
5. A method of providing a vehicle occupant with a first audible alert corresponding to a

first warning level or a second audible alert corresponding to a second warning level that is higher than the first warning level, to alert the vehicle occupant that his or her seat belt is unbuckled, the method comprising the steps of:

sounding a first alert chime by repeating an alert sound having prescribed frequency and volume at a first cycle during the first audible alert; and

sounding a second alert chime by repeating the same alert sound at a second cycle during the second audible alert.

6. A method as set forth in claim 5, wherein the first alert chime is sounded in an initial stage of the second audible alert prior to sounding the second alert chime.

7. A method as set forth in claim 6, wherein

the first audible alert is activated in response to detecting the seat belt being unbuckled upon turning on the ignition of the vehicle, and

the second alert is activated in response to detecting the seat belt being unbuckled when the vehicle is running at a prescribed speed or more.

8. A method of providing a vehicle occupant with a first audible alert corresponding to a first warning level or a second audible alert corresponding to a second warning level that is higher than the first warning level, to alert the vehicle occupant that his or her seat belt is unbuckled, wherein

during the second audible alert, an alert chime corresponding to the first warning level is sounded before an alert chime corresponding to the second warning level.